



Overlooking a seaside nature reserve, this serene property is decorated with weathered timbers and in a breezy blue and white palette that ensures it looks perfectly at ease in its stunning setting

WORDS JO LEEVERS
PHOTOGRAPHY RACHEL WHITING
PRODUCTION BEN KENDRICK



As the designer behind the interiors of several grand and atmospheric country houses in Kent, Francesca Rowan Plowden is known for layering rich colours and patterns. But when it came to her own house on the edge of Rye Harbour Nature Reserve, she took a rather different approach. 'It was important to me to create a sense of calm,' she explains. 'This house feels like a pocket of magic where all you can hear and see is nature and I wanted the interiors to express that.'

When Francesca and her former husband bought this house eight years ago, it looked very different. While it dated from the 1930s, it had been extended in the 1980s, with a garage to one side and a loft conversion. The result was a hotch-potch of styles and eras, but Francesca could immediately see how to give the house a more unified character, taking style cues from the colours, textures and light-bathed scenery that lie outside its front door.

The house looks out towards salt marshes where sheep graze and, beyond, the beach is a short walk away. Francesca wanted to bring in the deep blues of the sea, and timbers →



KITCHEN

Above The functional part of the room lies off the sociable areas with storage and appliances concealed by denim fabric. **Walls** in Stiffkey Blue, Farrow & Ball. **Denim**, Merchant & Mills. **Right** Francesca and her son Barnaby when he was a baby

LIVING AREA/KITCHEN

A woodburner set between the seating area and the kitchen/diner serves as a warm centrepiece. Carved **stag's head**, Eras Of Style. **Sofa**, sofa.com. Vintage Ercol **armchair**, Strand Quay Antiques





LIVING AREA

A wall of timber cladding unites the kitchen and living area with wool fleeces softening the look. [Sofa, sofa.com](#). Sheepskin rugs Find similar at John Lewis & Partners

reminiscent of cabin hideaways. The previous owner had been very particular about who she sold the house to. She could sense that Francesca had its best interests at heart and decided she wanted Francesca and her family to have it. So when another prospective buyer attempted to nip in, they failed to make headway. 'Fortunately, the owner liked us and the fact we had lots of children,' says Francesca.

With her interior design knowledge, Francesca was able to envisage how the flow of the layout could be improved, and implemented structural changes, which included removing a wall and incorporating the former garage into the house. 'Now, the kitchen and sitting room are all one big open living space, with a double-sided woodburner in the middle,' she says. Part of the old garage is now a second living area, with glazed doors giving views of the surrounding landscape. Two bedrooms and a family bathroom are downstairs, while the loft level was reconfigured to create an ensuite for the main bedroom.

As a long-time resident of nearby Rye, Francesca was already familiar with the beauty of the area and the local beach in all seasons. 'I wanted this to be a house that could be used throughout the year, with a cabin rather than a beach house feel,' she says. 'Now, it's light and airy in the summer and cosy in the winter months.' The decor reflects this aim, with



shiplap timber, hardwearing fabrics and deep blues and steely greys that nod to the nearby seascapes, while metal pendants and Tolix-style chairs add subtle gleam. Rather than overload the rooms, Francesca added carefully chosen pieces of furniture and art, many of which are vintage finds.

Rye and nearby Hastings are both rich pickings for vintage hunters. 'If I fall for something, I'll buy it, even if I don't know exactly where it will go,' explains Francesca. 'Eventually, everything finds its perfect spot, either in my own home or on a project.' She now runs Ferry Road Store, an interiors, homeware and fashion outlet in Rye, but she's always been a treasure hunter. 'Scouring antiques markets and vintage shops is a huge part of my design process,' she says. 'I'm always on the lookout for something that's quirky, eclectic and different. If an object or a piece of furniture is a little bit rough around the edges, it adds character and charm.'

The scaffolding planks that Francesca has used as wall cladding are a case in point, with every knot, dent and divot acting as a reminder of the material's original purpose. Similarly, fabrics such as denim, used as a 'skirt' to conceal shelving and appliances, and a deep blue linen on the sofas, have a hardworking character. For more indulgent touches, Francesca has layered sheepskins and laid flatweave rugs on the painted floorboards.

As the base materials and colours evoke a mood that is crisp, clean and fresh, it is texture that brings personality and depth to each room. 'Texture is so important, especially if you want to incorporate the surrounding nature into a scheme,' explains Francesca. Whether it's the cable-knit pattern of a woollen throw, the warmth of bleached timber or the sheen of a vintage light, texture adds interest to every room: 'It makes the difference between a property being a box and it feeling like home.'

Ultimately, this is a house that reflects its surroundings and is designed to evoke the same emotions that Francesca experienced the first time she came here. 'It feels serene,' she says. 'I can be a spectator of nature but also relax here with my family. It's a place where time can stand still.'

See Francesca's interior design work at rowanplowden.com and find Ferry Road Store at ferryroadstore.com

'This house feels like a pocket of MAGIC where all you can hear and see is NATURE'

DINING AREA

A 'runner' was painted onto the stairs that lead to the main bedroom. Tolix-style chairs add shine to a near-monochrome scheme. Floorboards and staircase painted in Railings. Farrow & Ball. Round table Find similar at Habitat



BEDROOM

Tucked under the eaves, this space has a cosy, cabin-like feel, with a cute peephole window overlooking the coastal landscape →



MAIN BEDROOM

Left Francesca unearthed the painted cabinet on one of her regular rummages in local vintage and antiques shops, while an extra loft area makes a snug hideaway

BATHROOM

Below left Pale panelling gives a fresh, rustic feel. Vintage tapestry picture, McCully & Crane. **Bath** Find similar at Drummonds. **Panelling** painted in Ammonite, Farrow & Ball

EXTERIOR

Below right The 1930s house was united with its 1980s garage with traditional exterior cladding

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